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Letter dated 22 December 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, have the honour to transmit herewith a summary note of the special meeting held on 10 November 2016 with women's protection advisers focused on implementing the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Román **Oyarzun**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 22 December 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Meeting with women's protection advisers focused on implementing the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict, 10 November 2016

Summary

On the occasion of the annual workshop of women's protection advisers, held in New York from 7 to 11 November 2016, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security met on 10 November for a discussion with women's protection advisers from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the sexual and gender-based violence focal point on the human rights team of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from UNMISS highlighted several opportunities for and challenges to combating conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan. Opportunities for addressing conflict-related sexual violence included the joint communiqué signed by the Government of South Sudan and, on behalf of the United Nations, by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in which the President committed to addressing conflict-related sexual violence, as well as the unilateral communiqué issued by the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition. An implementation plan with the Government had been developed, yet progress had been slow and the required funding was lacking. Furthermore, UNMISS had prepared a mission strategy to combat conflict-related sexual violence that included the following five pillars: (a) prevention; (b) monitoring and analysis; (c) mainstreaming conflict-related sexual violence; (d) capacity-building of national security forces, raising awareness among traditional leaders and training civil service organizations and the media; and (e) providing technical support for the Government to address conflict-related sexual violence. Other opportunities had arisen from the establishment of a technical working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements in 2014 and an engagement with the United Kingdom to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to meet the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as ongoing work on action plans for the military and the police of South Sudan. The challenges to addressing conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan included the ongoing fighting, a widespread lack of understanding of basic

human rights, compounded by denial and trivialization of sexual violence, weak institutions that failed to hold perpetrators accountable, and the limited services available for survivors.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from MINUSMA highlighted successes in addressing conflict-related sexual violence, such as ensuring that the peace agreements did not include amnesty for perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. In June 2016, a unilateral communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence was signed by la Plateforme, a coalition of armed groups. Moreover, the women's protection advisers established a network of focal points for conflict-related sexual violence in the United Nations country teams and MINUSMA, prepared a draft mainstreaming plan for the United Nations system on addressing conflict-related sexual violence and continued work on a joint project with UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund to provide services to sexual violence survivors in Mali and to ensure access to security and justice. Priorities for women's protection advisers in MINUSMA going forward included: (a) continuing to engage with the Government, and with the coalition of armed groups known as la Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad in making concrete commitments to address conflict-related sexual violence; (b) supporting and monitoring the implementation of la Plateforme's one-year plan addressing conflict-related sexual violence; and (c) supporting the Truth, Reconciliation and Justice Commission through training on appropriately handling cases involving victims of conflict-related sexual violence. The women's protection advisers faced numerous challenges in carrying out their work, including attacks by jihadist groups on MINUSMA, weak State authorities in the north of the country and a persistent culture of impunity for conflict-related sexual violence. The Senior Women's Protection Adviser further noted inadequate budget and staffing as additional challenges and stressed the need to link the mandate to funding and resources.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from UNSOM reported a high level of conflict-related sexual violence and sexual and gender-based violence in Somalia in 2015. Thirty-seven per cent of survivors were internally displaced persons and 99 per cent were women. Allegations concerned the Somali National Army, the Somali Police Force and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Most of the perpetrators, however, were unidentified armed men. Impunity remained a main concern and the prevailing stigma of sexual violence led to severe underreporting. The availability and accessibility of services for survivors were a concern, since service provision continued to depend heavily on the contribution of civil society, despite increased efforts by the Government in that regard.

Opportunities for the Senior Women's Protection Adviser included: (a) the Government's willingness to address conflict-related sexual violence issues on the basis of the joint communiqué and related action plan; (b) working with AMISOM to address allegations of conflict-related sexual violence against AMISOM forces, on the basis of the human rights due diligence policy; and (c) improved monitoring and reporting through monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements. Some key challenges included the need to strengthen the capacity of the national Government to prioritize and implement the action plan to address conflict-related sexual violence, the need to establish referral pathways and strengthen civil society organizations and the justice system in Somalia, the limited resources of UNSOM to

implement the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict, the weak justice system in Somalia and the lack of accountability mechanisms with certain troop-contributing countries operating in Somalia.

In response to questions from Security Council members, women's protection advisers added the following points:

- **Integration of women's protection advisers into their missions**. The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from MINUSCA noted the utility of monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements as a good mechanism for building a network within the mission. The technical working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements was a catalyst for information-sharing and collaboration between mission components.

- **The importance of leveraging religious leaders in condemning sexual violence**. Religious leaders played an important role in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. In drafting a national action plan to address conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs contributed by taking a position, in the context of Islam, against rape and conflict-related sexual violence. The Somali Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Human Rights also held several activities on addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

- **Sharing information and best practices with other women's protection advisers**. Women's protection advisers in the neighbouring countries of Côte d'Ivoire and Mali were in regular direct contact with each other, a model of collaboration that other women's protection advisers could replicate. The women's protection advisers workshop was also identified as a key venue for sharing information.

- **Adequate resources for the implementation of the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict**. The senior women's protection advisers noted that the mandate gave them a solid basis upon which to operate, but confirmed that the lack of adequate resources was a challenge.

- **Differences between women's protection advisers and gender advisers**. Mention was made that women's protection advisers and gender advisers played distinct, yet complementary, roles. Women's protection advisers were key for ensuring the implementation of the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict. They addressed conflict-related sexual violence through the implementation of monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements, engaged with the parties to conflict to obtain specific commitments to address conflict-related sexual violence and supported parties to conflict in implementing those commitments. Women's protection advisers coordinated with the United Nations country team to respond to cases of conflict-related sexual violence and worked through various mission components on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, justice and accountability issues. They collaborated with gender advisers to ensure that gender analysis informed the implementation of the mandate to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. Gender advisers counselled the mission on gender issues, ensured the integration of gender perspectives in policies, in planning and in reporting by all mission components, contributed to capacity-

building of national and local partners (civil society, Government) and coordinated with United Nations partners on global gender mainstreaming mechanisms.

- **Impact of the Informal Expert Group on women's protection advisers**. A positive impact had been noted for women's protection advisers in terms of leverage to engage with their mission's leadership in addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

The Co-Chairs ended the meeting by thanking the women's protection advisers for their efforts on the ground and for bringing the issues mentioned in the briefing to the attention of the experts and by reiterating their support for the work of the women's protection advisers and the implementation of the mandate to prevent sexual violence in conflict.